specific instances of large scale diversion of foodgrains/kerosene/sugar, meant for the Public Distribution System (PDS), have come to notice.

The responsibility for distribution of foodgrains under the PDS to consumers, through the Fair Price Shops, rests with the State Governments/UT Administrations who have been urged, from time to time, to closely monitor the PDS at the FPS (and other levels) and to make effective arrangements for the distribution of PDS commodities in a transparent and accountable manner through the involvement of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the rural areas and of local bodies in the urban areas.

In order to further streamline the functioning of the PDS, the Public Distribution System (Control) Order, 2001 was issued under Section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955; the Order, *inter alia*, contains provisions to empower the State Governments/UT Administrations to curb diversion, eliminate bogus ration cards and initiate legal action in respect of the erring FPS owners. An offence committed in violation of the provisions of the order invokes criminal liabilities under Section 7 of the Act.

A Task Force has also been constituted at the Central level to look into complaints in the implementation of the TPDS/Antyodaya Anna Yojana in the States/UTs. A Model Citizens' Charter has been issued to all the States/UTs for adoption.

Harassment of Haj Pilgrims

*415. SHRI KHAN GHUFRAN ZAHIDI:

MAULANA OBAIDULLAH KHAN AZMI:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether prospective Haj pilgrims are harassed by Passport Offices i verifying agencies in U.P.; and

(b) if so, what remedial steps are proposed in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.